

CALL ME MODEM

Communications by computer

by SUZI SUBECK

In case you hadn't noticed, the realms of personal computing and communications have discovered each other, and — as a result — neither will ever be the same again. Today, with a modem, an Atari personal computer (PC), a telephone and the appropriate software, you can hook up to a giant network of free, public-access bulletin board systems (BBS's) that spans the U.S. Approximately 100 of these are Atari-specific. Each BBS brings people with common interests together by giving them the opportunity to exchange ideas, information, and public-domain software.

The rapid growth of public-domain bulletin boards for home users has taken away some of the appeal of expensive, commercial systems, such as **Compu-Serve** and **The Source**, which require users to pay an initial membership fee plus hourly charges for on-line use. These systems use massive mainframe computers to cater to business and industry. They provide their clientele with access to an extensive news and information network, which includes data such as up-to-the-minute stock market reports, sports scores and even the news reported by the daily *New York Times*.

Many Atari home computerists have subscribed to services such as Compu-Serve because they offer on-line games and access to special interest groups such as SIGATARI. Now, however, something both cheaper and friendlier can offer many of the same services. Although many Atari users purchase

modems in the first place to download the abundant free, public-domain software that is available from BBS's, they quickly discover that most boards have quite a bit more to offer.

A BBS is run on a remote machine, which is known as the "host," or the "host computer." You access the host computer via normal telephone lines (whether local Bell, long-distance AT&T or other local or long-distance services). To link your Atari to a BBS, you'll need to use a modem (MODulator-DEModulator). This device translates your computer's digital signals to sound waves that can be transmitted over the phone lines, and vice-versa. Most modems require the presence of an RS-232 (standardized serial) interface between the computer and modem. The Atari 850 Interface Module provides the RS-232 interface for Atari computers.

If your finances are tight, however, it's possible to do without the 850 by using special terminal software and connecting the modem directly to the computer through one of the joystick ports. Two such modems are the **MPP-1000C** from Microbits Peripheral Products, and **Volksmodem** from Anchor Automation.

Your computer needs a terminal program to activate and control the modem. AMODEM, a popular and useful terminal program, appears in this issue for your convenience. AMODEM incorporates the XMODEM protocol, which greatly simplifies file transfer between two computers. Many C/P/M bul-

letin boards use the XMODEM protocol, so you'll have access to many types of previously unavailable programs. XMODEM protocol also functions as an error-checking system. It reads a program one sector at a time as it enters the buffer, and allows up to ten retries if a sector is not read properly.

BBS SPONSORSHIP

Local computer store owners or Atari users' groups sponsor most Atari bulletin board systems. These organizations provide area Atari owners with a valuable measure of user support, because a BBS is an excellent source of information and advice about using your Atari PC.

Occasionally, BBS's are run by individuals out of their homes or offices, but this is unusual due to the special demands of sponsoring such a system. After all, regardless of sponsorship, a BBS requires a certain amount of daily maintenance, and needs a "sysop," or system operator, to keep it running smoothly.

Sysops update message files, rotate uploads and downloads, and answer users' questions. In addition, most sysops try to find some time each day for on-line "chats" with willing callers.

In the same way that the terminal software operates the resident computer (the one that makes the call), BBS software operates the host (or answering) computer. In contrast to the large number of available Atari terminal pro-

continued on page 18



grams, there are fewer than half a dozen BBS programs from which to choose. Most Atari BBS's are run with AMIS (Atari Message and Information Service). Because AMIS software is in the public domain, sysops freely modify and upgrade it. As a result, even a newcomer to the field of Atari telecommunications will find AMIS boards to be very user-friendly. They don't use passwords, and their Command Menus are easy to use.

The typical AMIS Command Menu looks like this:

A = ASCII/ATASCII switch
 B = Bulletins
 C = Chat with Sysop
 D = Download
 E = Enter Message
 F = File Directory
 G = Good-bye
 I = Information about System
 P = Full/Half Duplex Toggle
 Q = Quick Scan of Messages
 R = Retrieve Messages
 S = Scan Messages
 U = Upload
 X = Expert Mode
 ? = Reprints this list

AMIS COMMANDS

The ASCII/ATASCII switch affects only what is seen on the screen. The "A" command toggles the board between the two modes. If the host is in ATASCII, the resident should be in ATASCII, too.

The "C" command pages the sysop, but the caller can continue to use the board even if the sysop is not available.

The "D" command allows you to receive — or download — a file.

The "F" command prints the list of files available for downloading. Always use the "F" command before the "D" command, because a BBS's download menu can change daily.

The "Q" command scrolls a list of current message titles across the screen.

The "S" command scrolls the title, date, sender and recipient of the message.

The "R" command allows you to retrieve specific messages.

The "E" command lets you post a message on the BBS. This message can be addressed to a specific person, or to

A WEALTH OF ATARI BULLETIN BOARD SYSTEMS

| ST | PHONE NUMBER | NAME | PSWD | HOURS | COMMENTS |
|----|--------------|---------|------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| AL | 205-979-0512 | BACE | NO | EVENING | |
| CA | 213-766-3634 | CKPBZM | ? | 24 HR | TRouble with LOGON |
| CA | 408-253-5216 | GFX | NO | 24 HR | EXCEPTIONAL—DO CALL |
| CA | 408-732-1079 | VANVSN | ? | 24 HR | |
| CA | 408-578-2390 | BAUG | YES | 24 HR | |
| CA | 619-447-8143 | SDACE | NO | 9PM-4AM | MON. THRU THURS. ONLY |
| CA | 714-781-8774 | AFAC | NO | 24 HR | |
| CA | 805-544-8173 | SLOPOKE | NO | 24 HR | NICE CLUB-RUN BOARD |
| CA | 805-922-6630 | LSMAUG | NO | 6PM-10AM | |
| CA | 818-760-8515 | ELITE | YES | DAYTIME | SOFT SYNDICATE ¹ |
| CA | 818-766-3634 | COMPKID | YES | 24 HR | SOFT SYNDICATE |
| CA | 916-363-3304 | ACCESS | ? | 24 HR | KEPT HANGING UP |
| CO | 303-758-2927 | GCP | NO | 24 HR | EXCEPTIONAL SYSTEM |
| GA | 404-252-9438 | RODR | NO | 24 HR | NICE SYSTEM. |
| IA | 515-961-8891 | MIDAMER | NO | 24 HR | |
| IL | 217-235-2000 | ICTC | NO | 24 HR | LOTS OF D/L ² |
| IL | 312-544-7228 | SCAT | NO | 24 HR | SYSOP MOST HELPFUL |
| IL | 312-789-0499 | RCPM | YES | 24 HR | 210+ D/L ON DRIVE F:2 |
| IL | 312-889-1240 | CLAUG | NO | 24 HR | 2 DBL DENSITY DRIVES |
| IL | 312-925-2929 | WZ BNG | YES | 24 HR | ONE OF THE BEST |
| IL | 312-335-1652 | FDAI | NO | EVENING | |
| IL | 312-678-1617 | GLCTIC | YES | 24 HR | FEATURES CONTESTS ETC |
| IL | 312-945-0377 | SHWDFRS | YES | 24 HR | |
| IN | 219-738-7280 | ALIEN | NO | 9PM-9AM | LOTS OF D/L |
| IN | 219-262-3980 | HARTCTY | NO | 24 HR | |
| LA | 504-273-3116 | RBBS | NO | 24 HR | LARGE SYSTEM |
| MA | 617-266-7789 | BSTBULT | NO | 24 HR | GREAT RCPM ³ |
| MA | 617-444-5401 | KINGCST | NO | 24 HR | |
| MA | 617-657-7388 | MACROEX | NO | 24 HR | 1200 BAUD OPT |
| MA | 617-595-0211 | NO SHR | NO | 24 HR | 1200 BAUD OPT |
| MD | 301-974-4987 | SEVPK | YES | 24 HR | |
| MI | 313-368-4828 | PLGRND | NO | EVENING | |
| MI | 313-544-0885 | MACE | NO | 24 HR | |
| MI | 313-274-3940 | MACEW | NO | 24 HR | |
| MI | 313-538-0197 | DARTBD | NO | LATE NITE | |
| MI | 313-978-8087 | ARCADE | NO | 24 HR | GOOD BBS LIST |
| MI | 313-427-1402 | CAPKIRK | YES | 24 HR | ON-LINE SHOPPING |
| MI | 313-547-7903 | CPUAPAT | NO | 24 HR | |
| MI | 313-623-1089 | TBBS | NO | 24 HR | |
| MI | 313-776-9792 | SOFTHSE | NO | 24 HR | ON-LINE SHOPPING |

"ALL." In either case, once the message is posted any caller is free to read it.

The "U" command allows you to send — or upload — a file transfer.

SPECIAL FEATURES

A number of sysops have personalized their AMIS Boards to include quick sign-on features, or detailed information about available downloads. Because of this, the wise caller will read through the Command Menu the first time he or she signs on to a system.

Every Atari BBS features a message area which allows users to share information. New callers often pose questions; experienced callers respond. There are offers to sell or trade equip-

ment and software — and many good buys are there for the asking! Best of all, new friendships develop daily because of these exchanges.

Most Atari BBS's maintain a list of other bulletin boards. These can be captured to buffer and then dumped to tape, disk or a printer. Such a list can either be included with the available downloads, or can be accessed with the "O" command.

You may get a list of boards within a certain calling range, or a list that includes only Atari-specific boards. It is impractical to list all known BBS's in the U.S., because such a list would exceed your available buffer space and would inevitably be somewhat out-of-date.

| ST | PHONE NUMBER | NAME | PSWD | HOURS | COMMENTS |
|----|--------------|---------|------|---------|-----------------|
| MI | 616-241-1971 | GRASS | NO | 24 HR | |
| MO | 314-928-0598 | AURA | NO | 24 HR | |
| MO | 816-587-9543 | ANTWAR | YES | 24 HR | |
| MO | 816-252-4467 | COMPSTP | YES | 24 HR | |
| MO | 816-461-7635 | CARNVAL | YES | 24 HR | |
| NJ | 201-533-9377 | ATLANTS | YES | 24 HR | |
| NY | 212-927-6919 | DANTINF | YES | 24 HR | |
| NY | 212-464-3434 | CRYPT | YES | 24 HR | DANDY-NET |
| NY | 212-357-4112 | ATARINN | YES | 24 HR | DANDY-NET |
| NY | 212-241-8965 | SPIWEB | NO | 24 HR | |
| OH | 216-439-5534 | NOCOAST | YES | EVENING | NICE D/L |
| OK | 405-495-2718 | UNDGRND | YES | 24 HR | SOFT SYNDICATE |
| OK | 405-681-4024 | UNONSH | YES | 24 HR | SOFT SYNDICATE |
| OK | 405-792-5056 | GRECOM | NO | 24 HR | NICE LARGE SYS |
| OR | 503-343-4352 | ACE | NO | 24 HR | GREAT LARGE SYS |
| PA | 215-333-3753 | JRBBS | NO | 24 HR | |
| PA | 412-754-0800 | PACE | NO | 24 HR | |
| TX | 512-837-2003 | ARMADLO | NO | 24 HR | |
| TX | 817-534-4346 | STARWRS | YES | 9PM-6PM | ADVENTURE-LIKE |
| TX | 817-595-3195 | COMPTLK | YES | 24 HR | |
| VA | 804-722-0935 | PACEWRD | NO | ? | |
| WI | 414-355-6031 | MILTARI | NO | 24 HR | |

I have not tested the following BBS's myself, but these numbers appeared on an information sheet (updated as of January 1984) from Atari User Group Support:

| | | | |
|----|--------------|----------------------|---------|
| AK | 907-456-1677 | FAIRBANKS | |
| AR | 501-646-0197 | FT. SMITH | |
| CA | 213-783-8373 | ENCINO | |
| CO | 303-758-6223 | ARVADA | |
| DC | 202-796-8342 | DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA | |
| ME | 207-839-2337 | GORHAM | |
| NJ | 201-377-4084 | HIGH BRIDGE | |
| NJ | 609-234-9240 | VINCENTOWN | |
| NC | 919-892-4949 | FAYETTEVILLE | |
| OR | 503-245-9405 | PORTLAND | |
| PA | 215-836-5116 | PHILADELPHIA | 5PM-8AM |
| TX | 817-532-2981 | W. FT. WOOD | 6PM-6AM |
| VA | 804-898-7493 | HAMPTON | |
| WA | 509-624-2636 | SPOKANE | 8PM-6AM |

1. Name of BBS's sponsor. 2. Download material. 3. Remote CP/M.

Many sysops update their BBS lists four to six times a year, and regular callers help keep them informed, but nonetheless BBS's appear and disappear daily. Although this is frustrating for a newcomer, just stick with it — seasoned callers are immune!

Some sysops divide the message areas of their boards into special interest groups (SIG's). One SIG may be set aside for fans of text adventures, one for those interested in current computer events — such as upcoming computer shows and user club meetings — and another for users who are looking for computer-related jobs. Atari BBS's usually offer their users the chance to help one another while helping themselves.

GETTING INVOLVED

Whatever you want from a BBS is probably out there somewhere. Just be prepared to live through some unexpected adventures while trying to find it! Beware, though. Home telecommunications is a highly addictive hobby that often claims its victims in the wee, small hours of the morning. While the rest of the world is sound asleep, hard-core modem users are fighting it out in the Battle of the Busy Signal!

The list of Atari BBS's included here should help save wear and tear on your eyes and telephone. I've contacted each number within the past several months and believe that each BBS listed is strong and functional, and will continue to

operate well beyond the time you read this.

Finally, here are three tips to help you bridge the communication gap:

1) Keep this list close to your modem for ready reference, along with future updates that will appear in *Antic*.

2) Remember that evening hours are prime time in the world of telecommunications. Call during the day if at all possible.

3) Use a long-distance network such as Sprint or MCI if you plan to make a large number of long-distance calls. Otherwise, your enormous phone bills will lead you to wonder why you ever looked at a modem.

MORE TO COME

This is the first in a regular series on home telecommunications and the Atari PC's. In coming months, I'll explore additional aspects of free, public-domain BBS systems: tell you about "specialty" boards that feature on-line games, multiple job listings, X-rated jokes, and matchmaking questionnaires; keep you up-to-date on new hardware and software products; and explain how to use message areas more effectively, download without XMODEM, operate CPM boards and more.

Sysops can help *Antic* keep its list of BBS's up-to-date by sending information about their systems to me, Suzi Subeck, c/o *Antic Magazine*, 524 Second Street, San Francisco, CA 94107. We'll do our best to keep the list as timely and accurate as possible.

Suzi Subeck was convinced by her husband Stan and two children — Lisa, 12, and Scott, 11 — to get seriously involved in Atari computing and telecommunications. As a result, she's been editing a newsletter for Computer Squad, an Atari computer users' group in the southern suburbs of Chicago, since last September. In addition, she started her own BBS in March of this year. This is the first series of articles on Atari telecommunications. Other articles in the series will appear in our new Communications Department in upcoming issues.

